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ABSTRACT

The language of Black America is rich and diverse in its utterance, whether through music (Jazz, Blues, Soul, Gospel, and Rap), through street corner "shuckin' 'n jivin'," or through writing. This language is used as a means of survival, of getting from one day to the next. Blacks have developed a system of taking the fewest words and making them mean the most. The use of repetition is an important element of the preaching of black ministers and can become a form of mimesis for the black teacher (or white teachers who wish to adopt it). Black schoolchildren also manipulate the standard forms of English. Blacks are very proficient in negation. Black Dialect is a language supported and encouraged through all facets of the community. It is a language with its own rules, structure, and meaning. The black novelist, poet, dramatist, and essayist have proven, over and over again, that they possess the skills, techniques, knowledge, and fortitude to produce works of art. In teaching black children it is important to be aware of the heroes of black America because, if any teacher is not aware of these heroes, the children are. "Students' Right to Their Own Language" (a Committee on Conference on College Composition and Communication Language Statement) should be used as an educational component for teacher preparation at whatever level of the learning spectrum. (Twenty-seven references are attached.) (RS)

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Street Corner Writing
By D. Alexander Holiday

Spring 1991

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Introduction

The language of Black America is one that is rich and diverse in its utterance whether through music, Jazz, Blues, Soul, Gospel and Rap; through street corner(hence the title of this paper)"shuckin' n jivin'" or "playin' the dozens"(which will be elaborated on later); or through writing, in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and *Beloved*, Richard Wright's *Native Son*, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage*, or *Faith and the Good Thing*, or Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. This is a language that is spoken to us by parents and grandparents(and occasionally a great-grandparent), siblings use it between themselves(even to the exclusion of elders), people stand on street corners and use the language, beginning with something as common as, "Whas' up?" This is a language, moreover, that is spoken to us in our Black Baptist churches by our ministers(for those who have such a religion). Finally, even the brothers(and the few sisters) residing in concrete apartments(translation: prison cells) are making use of this, and formulating their own, language.

For the next few pages, it is my wish to invite you, the reader, into my culture and show you how the language(part one) works and how this language manifests itself in the writing(part two). No, I will not divulge all of its nuances, its <u>thingness</u>, its components. One reason is because the language is different depending on what area of the country you are in. This language

changes quickly, is constantly evolving(Rap music can be used as an example). Finally, it is a language of exclusion and, so, in a sense I feel obligated to keep the secrets hidden(besides, as I get older and "more educated" I get shut out of the language as well). With all of this in mind, welcome.

The Language

The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second sight in this American world,--a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,--an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk.*

In any major city in America, New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Miami or Atlanta for example, and specifically those populated with a large percentage of Blacks, and depending on where you are and who you talk to this title will change to Afro-American, Coloreds, Negroes, people of color and various others(all of which are important and which people are sensitive too), and on any given street corner you can find black people, predominately black youth, gathered(chillin'), engaged in activities from watching the girls go by(scopin' or checkin' out the honeyz), to exchanging the latest news(shootin' the breeze or givin' the word), or trying to look impressive for others, mainly a girl(smilin' n profilin'), and yes, unfortunately, some of them are selling drugs. The drug world, once again however, has it's own separate and distinct *language*.[1] Whatever the situation, Blacks are making use of a privileged language as a means of "gettin' ovuh," "shuckin' n jivin," "playin' the dozens," "runnin' down some lines," or makin' it. In short, language is used as a means of *survival*, of getting from one day to the next. For example, in the case of "shuckin' n jivin,'" the use of language and gestures to get around an authority figure(the Man, the POlice) are jointly used to manipulate the thoughts and actions of another member of society, in this case one that is in a position to seriously alter the living arrangements of those who cannot make use of "shuckin' n jivin'."[2] In addition to this, a person can get involved in "playin' the dozens"(which is *ranking* in Philadelphia, *joining* in Washington, or *signifying* in Chicago), again language used to arouse hostility and anger by making another feel embarrassment, shame, or frustration, or to diminish someone's status(see Linn, 150-51).

Furthermore, if you listen closely to this language, you will hear the rich intonations, the magical cadence, and the eloquent coded rhetoric. In short, this is what Geneva Smitherman wants us to think of black speech as having two dimensions: language and style. Black people have taken language, one that is an Africanized form of English, and have done something very funky wid it(Sorry, funky refers to the down-to-earth soulfully expressed sounds, the fundamental essence of life, soul to the max, maximum, and which is very common in black culture, words that have a "th" ending can get either a "d" semantical ending or an "f" ending). But, this will all bear itself out better once we take a quick stroll through the 'hood(neighborhood) and listen to people speaking the language.

Our first stop is at an apartment of a black mother and her three children, Listen:

> *Girl, ya bedda git dat boy's black butt in dat bathroom, naht now!*

Now, don't fret none. Nothing abusive is happening here, or even likely to(yet). Let us clarify what is transpiring in this little piece of dialogue. A mother has given bath responsibilities to the oldest(perhaps) child(a girl), who may be having trouble with a younger brother as it nears his bedtime (the arrival of bedtime is usually announced with the taking of a bath and may hold true for other cultures). The mother's, "Ya bedda git dat...," can be deciphered easily enough into, "You *had* better get that...." Threw an extra word in on ya, huh? Black diction is infamous for doing just that, deleting a verb where one should be present(according to white standard

English) or adding an extra verb or pronoun where one should not be(ex: *Jasper, he be outta town fo' weeks, now* for *Jasper has been out of town for four weeks, now*). Back to the mother and her children. Did you notice the stress on the word, "Right," so that it came out with an "ah" sound, therefore we get, "raht" (which can almost sound like the word, "rat," but not quite)? Two, final, observations are important here. "...boy's black butt...," believe it or not is a remark of affection of a black parent to one of their young'uns(and I should have said "its" so as to stay in the singular=singular tense). Confused? It gets worse before it gets better. Finally, it is important to note that this remark is not directed towards one child, or even the two, but all three(I did say she had three children). How? It works something like this: The girl better work a little harder on getting the boy in the tub; the boy better pay attention to his sister(before mom takes over); and the third child should be aware that his or her turn is coming and *dere bedda not be no haf steppin' on elsel raht now!*). This is a piece of that magic I mentioned earlier. Blacks have developed a system of taking the fewest words and making them mean the most.

Next we stop at a church. Now, keep in mind here that the ethnographers, sociologists and even the linguists have all suddenly found out that one of the major icons in the black community is the church, more specifically the black church and even more specifically, the black preacher(or minister). Our clearest example of this was in the person of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a Baptist preacher who was able to move the

multitudes. White America killed him, but, it bees dat way sometime. Stay close, now, and listen to the music, the feet stomping, and the hand clapping, each moving in rhythmic proportion to one another. As you come inside, you will see people "gittin the spirit," or being told to "Tell the truth." As individuals go through their "testifyin," you will hear others exclaim, "Well, all right!" or *Lord ham mercy, Lord a mercy*(Lord have mercy). The preacher, as he speaks, uses repetion:

> *I need someone out dere to be a witness fo' me.*
> *I said will someone out dere be a witness fo' me?*

The use of repetition helps to clarify scripture, bring unity to the brothers and sisters in the congregation, or push the sermon out further into the community. This use of repetition can become a form of mimesis for the black teacher(or white teachers who wish to adopt it).[3] It is important to keep in mind here that the preacher is very much a performer as he delivers his sermon, through use of gestures, repetition, all in an effort to "call" the people to "testify." This is a key way of getting folks involved. He is teaching, their response indicates that they are learning, or at least involved in the discussion. In short, black people need to be entertained. Any teacher who simply resorts to lecturing or glued to the blackboard is boring a certain portion of the classroom pretty close to death. Take this a step further. Milton Baxter, in "Educating Teachers about Educating the Oppressed," comments that, "Teachers will need to do more than involve themselves in in-service teacher training programs dealing with dialect variation. They will need to become sensitized to other communicative behavior of BEV speakers, including gestures, intonation

patterns, and various sorts of body language."[4] Moreover, L.S. Vygotsky refers to this as the *zone of proximal development*, Linda Flower and John Hayes refer to *generating ideas*(I was taught the Idea Generation Technique as a tutor) or *brainstorming*, and James Collins has come to understand that *oral narratives* are important to teaching people of color.[5] Taking the text to a "higher plain," by relating it to some aspect of their lives, helps students relate better to various concepts that would otherwise go right over their heads. This has to be presented to them, however, through narrative, gestures, questioning(repetition), and the like. Remember, black people are a movin', happenin' buncha folk. Teachers who are able to tap into this resource often find their classrooms more livelier, students are actually helping one another learn, and schools are producing more successful students.

There is one final place we need to stop at to observe this culture in action and that is at any public school where there is a large concentration of blacks. The *stylin n profilin'* is very apparent here, and so is the dialogue, verbal(spoken to each other) and in their Rap music, which some would say is a substitution of "rhetoric for content."[6] Whatever the case, this is all very important to these youngsters. As we listen to either dialogue, we immediately observe what Geneva Smitherman, John Baugh, Edith Folb, and Walter Brasch have cited in their books, this manipulation of the standard forms of English.

Black English, like French, German, Italian, Spanish and so on, is a language spoken by a large portion of a certain

class of people in this society and for *many* is the only language they know and understand. In *The Psychology of Black Language*(1968), Jim Haskins and Hugh F. Butts make the following observation:

> When black children come to school speaking the nonstandard black dialect, however, they are usually told, "You can't speak that way," or, "Don't use that language," and this criticism continues practically unabated throughout their years in school. Language is an identity label, a reflection and badge on one's culture; criticism of an individual's speech is thus really a criticism of his culture and all those who share it. Such criticism, coming as it does from an awesome authority figure such as a teacher, is not likely to enhance a small child's self-concept. In addition, from the child's viewpoint, the criticism is unfounded. The children know very well that they can talk "that way" and, furthermore, that they are understood by each other and by everyone else in their primary cultural environment. Their parents, neighbors, friends, relatives, and almost everyone else except the teachers at school talk "that way."(46)

The classroom is yet another area where racism attempts to stifle people who are different culturally. Recent research, by Julia Visor(1987) indicates that "these negative evaluations stem from a difference in the cultural perceptions and practices [Black] students bring to the academy and the cultural perceptions and practices they meet there."[7] Because of the way in which racism works, there is only a small cluster of black teachers available to assist in the education of black youth(I recall having *one* teacher who was black and *one*black professor in New York City). As a result, black kids often feel frustrated, alienated, or made to feel inferior, thus we see the results, poor grades, a dropout rate higher than the unemployment rate

and the snowball just gets bigger and bigger.

Before pulling away from my discussion of schools and making some concluding comments in this first half, I want to turn to *Talkin and Testifyin* and a discussion of negation(30-31) which blacks are very proficient in and which may help others understand where such speakers are comin from.

The rules for black negation, according to Smitherman, are as follows: if the statement consists of only *one* sentence, negate every item; if the statement consists of *two or more* sentences combined as one, all negatives indicate "positives," and all negatives, *plus one positive* indicate "negatives." Confusing? Here are some examples:

It ain nobody I can trust(White English: *I can trust no one.*)
It ain nobody I can't trust(White English: *I can trust everyone.*)

Wasn't no girls could go with us(White English: *None of the girls could go with us.*)
Wasn't no girls couldn't go with us(White English: *All the girls could go with us.*)

Ain't none these dudes can beat me(White English: *None of these dudes can beat me.*)
Ain't none of these dudes can't beat me(White English: *All these dudes can beat me.*)

Smitherman concludes this section by stating that, "Obviously this kind of understanding can help bridge the linguistic and cultural gap between blacks and whites and thus facilitate communication. However, certain cautions should be observed. First, do not expect *all* Black English speakers to use *all* these patterns *all* the time. The list is intended to be exhaustive of the range

of patterns you might encounter in a given situation, but some Black Dialect speakers may be more bi-dialectal than others, preferring to use White English around whites, Black English around blacks...."[8] This is a small segment, furthermore, of the "double-consciousness" that Du Bois refers to and that I opened this section with. Attempting to survive in an alien world, the black culture has had to develop several mechanisms that will aid in its preservation. Black English is only one of those mechanisms which he clings to for support, nurturing, solace(*It bees dat way sometime*), or guidance(*check it out, ya gotta git wid it, or ya gotta be down*). This is a language supported and encouraged through all facets of the community, the home, the church, people from aroun' the way, and even in school. It is a language, moreover, with its own rules, structure, and meaning. It is a language that can take vulgarity and position it in a positive, even affectionate, manner. Blacks have been able to manipulate the white racist stereotypes against this culture(*bad, dope, stupid, nigger, crazy,* etc.) and shift them to an advantage point. Finally, like the people who created it, the language will not go away. Spanish speaking people, Oriental speaking people, French speaking people, and Italian speaking people do not receive the abuse about their cultures as Black speaking people(and we can even teach Spanish in most schools, but not Black English). The color of a man's skin remains a deciding factor in whether he will be allowed in or kept out.

Several movements are now underway to salvage the black *male* child, since he has most of the bed space tied up in many

of the prisons throughout this country, and more than a few would suggest that he is becoming an endangered species, disappearing off our streets at an alarming rate. *Project 2000* (developed from the idea that *this* will be the graduating class in the year 2000) is one drastic, but necessary, attempt to do something for a group that often finds itself in "special education," or "remedial" classrooms because *they* "don't seem to want to learn," or other such foolish arguments. The boys in *Project 2000*, with strong black male role models volunteering their time, *are* learning. Once Standardized Testing is radically altered to accommodate the diverse dialects, then(and only then) will we get an exact measure of whether this project is working (not to say that it is not). I refer to *Project 2000*(and its coordinator's name 'scapes me fo' de moment) because it is, yet, another avenue for young black males to be involved in the educational process where their culture and *language* are warmly accepted and appreciated.

I shift now from comments *about* the language of Black America to those of what can be done *with* the language in the field of writing.

Cmon, check dis out.

The Writing

To read is to inhabit the role and real place of others;
to write is a stranger experience yet, for it involves
a corresponding act of self-surrender....

Charles Johnson, *Being & Race: Black Writing since 1970.*

Black America *can* write. This is borne out in the works of the writers mentioned in the introduction of this paper, a small list of names mind you(there is a stack more). Furthermore, depending on which writer one happens to be discussing for the moment, in any given novel the language of "the people" will immediately become apparent. Warning. The same *construction* of words that was demonstrated in the section on "the language" will appear here, in these novels. For example, in words like, *nothing, going, looking, praying,* or many words ending in "ing," the letter "g" is consciously dropped, so you now see *and* read these words as *nothin, goin, lookin,* and *prayin.* Don't expect to see, in most instances, the possessive /'s/ in sentences like: *Mary's house is on fire*(This becomes: *Mary house on fire*). Moreover, verb structure is quite different here. For example, the sentence, *Douglas has been working everyday,* can be seen and read as either, *Douglas, he be working,* or *Douglas been working*(and the word *everyday* becomes an option to be added or deleted as the speaker chooses). Finally, words such as, *dem, dose, dis, dat, mouf, souf, norf, wid, wif, fuh, suh,* and the like, words with a /th/ pronunciation in the initial position, *them, those,this, that* or at the end of certain words, *mouth, south, north, with,* and *with* again, because, again in some instances, we produce an /f/ sound as in the case of *north*(no one lives "up *nord,* or "down *soud*), and words ending in /r/ may get an /h/ sound, so *fir* and *sir* become *fuh* and *suh*(and whereas you may say, "Yes sir," we jam it together to produce "Yessuh"). Enough for the moment about grammatics. My intent is to stress that these are very *Actual Minds* constructing language in very *Actual Worlds,* to alter Jerome Bruner's title

to his book, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*. I will return to Bruner later. The black novelist, poet, dramatist, and essayist, have proven, over and over again, that they possess the skills, techniques, "the knowledge"[9] and the fortitude to produce good (no, great!) works of art. If, moreover, the black writer is able to take advantage of what Dr. Walter Brasch(1981) refers to as "eye dialect," the writing down of words *as* they *sound* (my italics), then the writing is only further enriched. Remember, black people write this way(and talk this way) because they are delivered the words in this fashion.

Tony Crowley, in *Standard English and the Politics of Language*(1989), observing comments made by W. Rippmann, cites:

> Dialects are appealing and interesting but ultimately crippling since they put the speaker at a disadvantage socially and intellectually in that they prevent 'aesthetic appreciation' of the national literature. Failure to speak the national, common, 'standard speech' allegedly entails a failure to be able to 'read' the common, national literature and therefore dialects militate against the sharing of the 'common culture'.(172)

I read the word "racism" between each line of Rippmann's remarks, especially if it would be left up to him to decide what this "common culture" is to be. Moreover, vast studies have begun to point out that one's *dialect* has little, if any, to do with one's *intelligence*. The works of Paulo Freire(1973), J.L. Dillard (1968-1973), M.M. Bakhtin(1981), and William Labov(1972) have, for example, have refuted the notion(s) that ignorance and speech go hand in hand. On the contrary, Labov's work concluded, in

part, that from an analysis of a specific interview between a Black English Vernacular speaker and a 'standard English' speaker, it was the Black English Vernacular speaker who showed verbal fluency and 'quick, ingenious and decisive' skills in argument while the 'standard English' speaker tended to produce verbiage and to be 'overparticular and vague' in discussion(Crowley, 265). I was hoping to refrain from having to spill it out for you, but, yes, there are some dumb black people and some ignorant white folks. Ignorance(or "dumbness") should not be related to a person's dialect. To put this in other words, I come back to Jerome Bruner and his comments on "The Language of Education," in which he states, "The medium of exchange in which education is conducted--language--can never be neutral, that it imposes a point of view not only about the world to which it refers but towards the use of mind(*sic*) in respect of this world(121)." Now, I have *no* idea what Bruner is suggesting here, I simply thought it would be impressive to throw in a quote by the man right about here. I am kidding. But, I am doing something with my "intelligence," am I not? Bruner goes on to end this chapter(of his book) in a very appropriate manner:

> The language of education is the language of culture creating, not of knowledge consuming or knowledge acquisition alone. In a time when our educational establishment has produced alienation from the process of education, nothing could be more practical than to look afresh in the light of modern ideas in linguistics and the philosophy of language at the consequences of our present school talk and at its possible transformations(133).

We appear to be moving in a good direction when we begin to

understand that *culture* is what comes into any classroom in any given city. With these separate cultures come issues of classism, racism, sexism and the like, and which(according to Linda Brodkey *I think*) cannot be confined to the classroom, teachers(not all) treating the classroom as some private world where only "certain things can go on behind closed doors"(my quotations) or "this world is different from that world." It is just not so. Students, moreover, should be entitled, and encouraged, to reflect those differences and in their varying dialects. The underlying message here, however, is that teachers need to study, get experience in, practice, or experiment in different cultures. You can begin here as I wrap up with some comments about my "prior texts."[10]

Black America has its heroes. A few were killed off and many of them are dead, but they are our heroes none the less. In teaching black children it is vitally important to be aware of these heroes, because if any teacher is not aware of these heroes, the children are. Any attempt to ignore these men and women of the past(along with the current heroes) is one of the gravest injustices that can be committed against a person with a black face.

Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Minister Louis Farrakan, and Ron Karenga are my prior texts. Richard Wright, who gave me *Native Son, Black Boy, 12 Million Black Voices, The Long Dream, The Outsider,* and "Blueprint for Negro Writing," in which he says, "The Negro writer who seeks to function within his race as a purposeful agent has a serious responsibility," along

with Dr. Carter Woodson who gave me *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, in which he reminds me that, "...the more "'education'" the Negro gets the worse off he is..."(109), as well as Toni Morrison, Zora Neal Hurston, Alice Walker, June Jordan, are my prior texts. Angela Davis, Jacqueline Fleming(*Blacks in College*), Lisa Delpit, and Geneva Smitherman, are my prior texts. Finally, W.E.B. Du Bois, Ralph Ellison, Charles Johnson, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Claude Brown, and Ishmael Reed, are my prior texts. The lists goes on and I hope I made a point. No, the area of composition is not one that warmly welcomes the writing of Black America as well as it should, so, the black writer relies(and should rely) on these masters. The writings of M.M. Bakhtin, Terry Eagleton, Mary Louise Pratt, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Hegel, Hume, Roman Ingarden, Leo Spitzer, et al, is somehow important. However, in my reading of them (and others) I can't separate myself from thinking that there is a disregard(maybe total) for the "other" cultures.

Finally, "Students' Right to Their Own Language," a Committee on CCCC Language Statement should be used if not as a "Bible" then surely as an educational component for teacher preparation at whatever level of the learning spectrum. Comments on grammar, dialect, thinking, language, etc., are here. From this Statement, we get:

> We should begin our work in composition with them by making them feel confident that their writing, in whatever dialect, makes sense and is important to us, that we read it and are interested in the ideas and person that the writing reveals.(15)

The "concept" of tolerance is not new.[11] That concrete wall of racism, however, prevents either of us from "gittin ovuh to de udder side" to engage in much productive dialogue. As a result, my brothers' and sisters' futures are in crisis, in jeopardy.

Afterword

I have taken a few liberties with *my* language to present a discourse in *your* language. Through my use of creativity, and I am a published creative writer, I hope that I have effectively written an "academic" paper, which I have written plenty of during my collegiate years. In fact, I recently wrote a twenty-five page paper(31 pages total) for a separate course(and which should have come after this one). And, I have been whitewashed. This is the *first* paper where I have given my "double-consciousness, that which Du Bois refers to, an audience. Don't, however, evaluate it for its creativity(although those comments are appreciated), or its "cuteness," but, rather, for its content, its substance. Afterall, if I were teaching, I would focus on content moreso than creativity(though the student may get points for that as well). Moreover, except for a few people writing their dissertations on "Black English Vernacular," "Dialect," doing "ethnographic investigations," or giving a "poststructuralist perspective," the writing is very slim. Books on the condition of Black English are available(see my selected bibliography), but even these are few and far between. *Talkin and Testifyin*, by Geneva Smitherman, was(by far) the best book on the subject and I highly recommend it to anyone interested *in a new thang*. Finally, Black English for all its "evilness" may not be as bad as all the double-talk we are all getting from various industries. You may want to check out William Lambdin's *Doublespeak Dictionary*(1979) and *Iah catcha later*.

Notes

[1]Edith A. Folb, in her book *runnin, down some lines: the language and culture of black teenagers*, in chapter 5(166-188) covers the language of drugs. Geneva Smitherman's book, *Talkin and Testifyin*(which I rely on heavily as a "prior text") has a glossary of terms, some referring to drugs, as does the Haskins and Butts book.

[2]Michael D. Linn, in "Black Rhetorical Patterns and the Teaching of Composition," explains some of the aspects of shuckin' and jivin'. This is developed by many blacks as "a keen perception of what is necessary to motivate, appease, or satisfy an authority figure who is confronting them." See also, John Baugh's book, *Black Street Speech: Its History, Structure, and Survival.*

[3]See the Michéle Foster article. The use of repetition, creative language play, rhythm, alliteration, and gestures have proven to be successful in the teaching of black students. As Ms. Morris(the teacher being studied here) comments: "You know if Black folks ain't talking and excited and involved, they ain't learning a thing, but most of what happens in school is dull. Dry, technical, and boring. School tries to make Black folks dull, but many of our students won't stand for it." (24).

[4]See Milton Baxter's article, page 680. See also, "Students Rights to Their Own Language," for further suggestions on what teachers can do to improve the educational atmosphere.

[5]L.S. Vygotsky, *Mind in Society*, with special attention to pages 84-91 for "zone of proximal development." Linda Flower and John Hayes' "A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing," would (to me) be more suited towards the beginner writer, someone who doesn't quite have a system down pact. Seeing the "generating ideas" concept brought flashbacks to my earlier learning the Idea Generation Technique(and I can't recall if Flower or Hayes were the developers behind the technique) for my job as a tutor. The technique works like a charm and is good for "pre-writing" (as Flower and Hayes state) and can be used during the actual drafting of a paper. This taking a concept(for a paper) and "brainstorming" on all of its points, relates to Vygotsky's zone. Collins' article is important. I particularly enjoyed, "Yet we now know...." Oral narratives have been the backbone of black literature, but because this literature has been excluded or ignored for the most part, it is only "now" beginning to be understood. Interesting.

[6]See page 24 of the April 1991 edition of *Emerge Magazine.* Some Rap lyrics are very powerful and full of content, while others leave a lot to be desired. But, this can be true of any musical art form. You take the good with the bad. As a writer of such lyrics(for a close family member) I would be interested....

[7]I used the MLA File search on the computer to get articles on "Blacks: Composition Writing" and it spewed out plenty of

gunk none of it really pertaining to Blacks and Composition writing. Furthermore, most of what came out are dissertations on the subject, as is Ms. Visor's article(a 316 page book to be exact), but Dissertation Abstracts International gives a brief synopsis of each dissertation. This one is from volume 49, number 3 of the September 1988 Abstracts(452-A). "Problems in composition: A Vygotskian perspective(233pp, by William Joseph, Rivers, Jr.) was one that caught my eye. It reads, in part, "This dissertation is a consideration of problems in written composition from the perspective of Vygotskian psycholinguistics. It is based on the idea that writing is primarily a means of knowing and only secondarily a means of communicating...inner speech, zone of proximal development, hyperliteracy...Writer's block is considered to be part of the process of writing instead of a dysfunction in the process. The final chapter discusses how the Vygotskian perspective of writing can be extended and applied."

[8]Smitherman. p31.

[9]All the texts for this semester's reading covered the topic of "knowledge" in one form or another("tacit knowing"-Polanyi, "sociology of knowledge"-Burger and Luckmann, etc.) I can't help feeling, however, that my knowledge is still somehow inferior to that of white society. This is a legacy of racism. Moreover, Lisa Delpit's, "The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People's Children," adds credence to some of these remarks.

[10]Considering "prior texts" for this discourse was not only difficult it bordered on impossible. Many journals were unavilable, and I "shopped around," books were out, missing, or outdated. However, Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s article, "Writing "Race" and the Difference It Makes(*Critical Inquiry* 12/1985) was another helpful piece of information. He cites Bakhtin, Derrida, Kant, Hegel and Hume.

[11]See the Allport book, pages 432-434.

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